



McLEOD RUSSEL
Believe in tea

To
Mr. Justin Rowlett
BBC South Asia correspondent

September 3, 2015

Dear Mr. Justin Rowlett,

We write with reference to your report following your visit to our Tea Estates in the third week of August in Assam and sent to our Company Secretary and to some of our customers in the UK.

We thought it best to respond to your queries by way of this note. We would like to state that the plantations are our pride and the workers our biggest assets. We are proud of our legacy and would have gladly shown the crew around our properties for a comprehensive view of our operations so they could form an opinion based not only on capturing some of the challenges but also taking into account our achievements at compliance and our commitment to welfare beyond statute. We would introduce ourselves as one amongst many passionate tea producing companies.

The McLeod Russel Group is an amalgam of two large groups, The Williamson Magor & Co Ltd and The McLeod Russel India Ltd which came together in the late 1980's. Subsequent acquisitions and mergers have made it into the largest privately owned Tea Plantation with an annual crop of over 120m Kgs spread across its plantations in Assam, Dooars, Rwanda, Uganda and Vietnam, employing over 100,000 workers.

The Company owes its history to the East India Merchants who were the founders of the company over 150 years ago. Therefore strong traditions and time-tested principles have been the guiding factors in running our business.

Post Independence, it was the Plantation Labour Act of 1951 which brought about an improvement in workers' living conditions and granting them their rights and privileges. However, the issues faced by our founders in the challenging environment of the North-East where the planter is left to battle the vagaries of drought and floods and a cyclical tea market remain unchanged. Thus it must be understood that the amenities such as housing and improvement of workers' living conditions is an ongoing exercise which can only best be achieved in a phased manner. We construct over 250 houses per year in Assam and are near-complete in our compliance, despite the incremental requirement each year as workers' families expand with matrimony.

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A Williamson Magor Group Enterprise

We encourage visits to our plantations by one and all and would have liked to show our work well beyond the scope of any statute including our CSR initiatives catering to the rural population around tea estates. These include schemes on empowerment of women such as the *Bodo Handloom Scheme*, Healthcare activities covering *free eye clinics* providing for corrective surgery, *Operation Smile* - correction of cleft lip and palate, provided through our network of over 128 hospitals, *Community Development Programmes* - engaging in *sustainable* employment generation, assistance to farmers in and around estates and initiatives on *Education* - providing modern education, scholarships and literary recognition.

Please see attached our press statement and response to the specific points you raised in your correspondence of 24th August and 1st September. We hope that you will portray an accurate account pertaining to these since you acknowledge this issue to be systemic across the industry whilst we continue to work with partners, local government and certification authorities as we move forward. This is an ongoing journey and the core of our medium and long term development programs.

For McLeod Russel India Limited,



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